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ABSTRACT

Based on the literature describing the boundary spanning role, a study focused on boundary spanning activities related to the public relations professional. Two major models, the adaptive and the selective, were examined in terms of key assumptions--economic rewards and competition. These models were further examined in terms of the larger perspective of standards held by those in multicultural communication. A third model was proposed which better serves society. In addition, the contextual connection of the model based on multicultural expectations better meets the needs of the ever changing organizational forms--the coalition, the network, the information associations, the technological relationships as well as the formal organization. The examination of several specific boundary spanning situations (gangs, community development) identifies critical characteristics of the boundary spanning activity when linked to a multicultural communication model where information may not be the primary focus. Results suggest other approaches for retraining/training public relations professionals for their new role. (Contains 15 references, and two tables and a pie chart.) (Author/RS)

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AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE BOUNDARY SPANNER: DEVELOPING A HOLISTIC COMMUNICATION MODEL WITH A CONTEXTUAL CONNECTION

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ABSTRACT

An Opportunity for the Boundary Spanner: Developing a Holistic Communication Model with a Contextual Connection

Based on the literature describing the boundary spanning role, this study focuses on boundary spanning activities related to the public relations professional. Two major models, the adaptive and the selective, are examined in terms of key assumptions--economic rewards and competition. These models are further examined in terms of the larger perspective of standards held by those in multicultural communication. A third model is proposed which better serves society. Plus the contextual connection of the model based on multicultural expectations better meets the needs of the ever changing organizational forms--the coalition, the network, the information associations, the technological relationships as well as the formal organization. The examination of several specific boundary spanning situations (gangs, community development) identifies critical characteristics of the boundary spanning activity when linked to a multicultural communication model where information may not be the primary focus. The results suggest other approaches for retraining/training those for the public relations professional role.

An Opportunity for the Boundary Spanner: Developing a Holistic Communication Model with a Contextual Connection

The nature of social problems today is more complex. Public relations activities similarly have become more complex. John Sattler noted in his memoirs, Fifty Years Ahead of the News: A Lifetime of Practical Public Relations Experience, the change in values and especially emphasized "today, the principal measure of our wealth is information: its quality, its quantity, and the speed with which we acquire it and adapt to it" (Sattler, 284).

It is the public relations professional who is associated with the role of "sending and seeking environmental information" (Kreps, 242). The public relations professional is in charge of communicating with the organizations environment and, in turn, obtaining the important information from the environment.

There is much focus on two ecological models-- the adaptation function and the selective function (Everett, 178). In comparing and contrasting the adaptation function and selection function it is noted that the primary difference is that the shift moves the "level of analysis from individual organizations to organizational populations (groups of related organizations) (Everett, 182). Although this paper recognizes the possibility of both the adaptation and selection model as feasible competitive models, the intent of this paper is to create another model which does not rely on an individual organizational or a meta-organizational level of focus. Rather the focus is on the nature of the organization, regardless whether treated as an individual or groups of related organizations. The emphasis stresses the nature of an organization as far more important than the groupings of the organizations. The pivotal point for analysis is to suggest that the philosophical purview which one holds is far more important than whether the environment is treated as a single or group phenomenon. It is critical to acknowledge that the adaptive and selective models are primarily the same in perceptual approach and that the chief concerns are with the following characteristics:

1. Greatly supports a capitalistic system
2. Stresses persuasion, logic, and dominating the listeners by well-trained speakers and writers (journalism, communication, mass communication, and speech communication origins).
3. Primarily a male perpetuated traditional system of building empires.

Although these concerns may seem rather unnecessary at this point, the following discussion unfolds some serious issues in pursuing a third and more socially acceptable model.

THE LIMITATIONS IN PERCEIVING THE "ORGANIZATION"

The analysis is partly based on the nature of the evolving concept of "organization." An organization under the adaptive and selective models tends to be just that--a well-defined cluster of people in which the internal and external audiences are easily identified. In contrast, today's very fluid world is not as officially organized publicly. Some of the more powerful groups, drug cartels, gangs, networks of people created through computer technology, newer associations (gray panthers), are not organized along a traditional format. Yet these groups are increasingly dominating our concerns whether through the media or through informal networks of communication. It is the failure to acknowledge the driving forces behind the adaptive and selective ecological models of communication--economics, personal skill, and dominance that reduces the possibility of addressing today's societal ills. Plus the more fluid, dynamic nature of emerging "organizations" is a primary concern and ignored by definition.

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Naming groupings along a continuation of increasingly public formality suggests the dimension of the problem. For example:

Associations - Coalitions - Networks - Formalized Nonpublic Organizations - Public Organizations

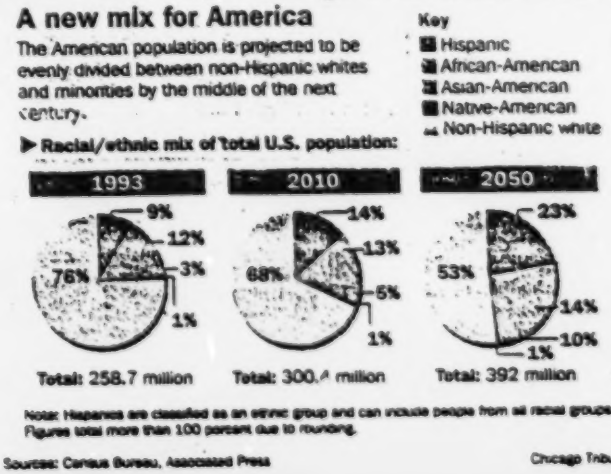
Scholars may be driven to think of management in public relations as a "corporate" concern, but the true work of many public relations professionals will be in the management of the communication environment. Here is where the real challenge lies.

A Review of the Adaptive and Selective Models

The nature of the concerns may seem not obvious. The terms are those that one banters around daily and accept as reality. Hazleton and Long's public relations process model is articulate fully the nature of a of a dominate ecological model. These authors see in the "environment five interrelated interacting dimensions: 1. a legal/political dimension, 2. a competitive dimension, 3. an economic dimension, 4. a social dimension, and 5. a technological dimension. These concepts borrowed from Gerald Goldhaber's book on Organizational Communication illustrate a second emerging issue. Note, first, how the external organizational communication contingencies and publics in the table below are emphasized:

External Contingencies	External Publics
Economic: amount of stability in current market competition and its impact upon capital resources available to organization	Customers Analysts Fund managers, individual investors, bankers, stockholders
Technological: degree of innovation in equipment and scientific research and development and the impact upon the organization	Trade associations Competitors Suppliers Research and development associations
Legal: degree of impact of local, state, and federal regulations, guidelines, and laws affecting organizational operations	Regulatory agencies Legislatures City councils, congress
Sociopoliticocultural: degree of impact of social, political, and cultural considerations upon the organization	Politicians Minority and special interest groups Consumer advocacy groups Unions, media
Environmental: degree of impact of climate, geography, population, density, and availability of energy upon the organization	Environmental protection groups Neighboring citizens groups Lobbyists

Note the people of color and special interest groups are clustered under sociopoliticocultural (sic) category (Goldhaber, 325) The failure to see these groups as the economic, technological, legal as well as environmental sectors is misleading reality. The Chicago Tribune graphs below clearly outline the rapid change over in terms of the ethnic distribution (Chicago Tribune, 1).



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Rather than thinking of ethnic as just in the cultural category, ethnic now permeates all sectors of the population. This rethnking somewhat suggests another model, other than those based on competition and economics, must be considered. Yet the competitive and economic dimensions are strong factors in the process model. With public relations professionals trained in the competitive model, many are attracted to the work in new economic development blocs (EEC, NAFTA, Asian Bloc). Public relations flourishes here with the competitive factor deeply embedded in the economic dimension. Of course, the highly skilled speaker and writer is the desired skill for these capitalistic battlegrounds. But let us take a closer look at some of the assumptions behind these concepts.

Competition. The current buzz words are "win-win" in the new approach to competition. Fisher, associated with the Harvard negotiation project, touted this as the ultimate "good feeling" in negotiation. The reality, however, smacked more of how to win and make the other party "think" they won, too. In other words, this was simply another form of dominating. This reaction was substantiated during an National Public Radio (NPR) interview with Nina Totenberg who pressed Fisher on that point basically stating: "Isn't this just another way to win and not to truly share that win?" Fisher exploded and hung up the telephone, on air. This further substantiates the inability of business to appreciate a broader view of scanning the environment, a view other than competition and, of course, the stakes are economic.

Economics. At first it seemed ridiculous to question the Goliath of our country--economics. Then in the process of rethinking the entire issue, more from a gender point-of-view, the reality of a male dominant perspective is clearer. It is somewhat like pulling back and remembering why the classics are indeed identified as classics. Obviously the classics are the required reading for generation after generation. Yet only one classic is written by a woman and none by a member of the people of color. One could conclude that women and people of color never produced literature. Yet, with the fear of being accused of rewriting history for the sake of rewriting history, it is equally notable that females and people of color were probably never on the selection committee. Old traditions and habits die hard. It is time as Riane Eisler stated: "To move beyond the dominator model of social organization" (Eisler, xx)

It is also important to note that the adaptive model as described by Koberg (also from management) includes two aspects: the scarcity of critical resources in the environment and the "environmental uncertainty as perceived by managers" (Koberg, 798). The latter aspect establishes an interpersonal domain which is beyond the skills level in speaking and writing and/or the philosophical purview as primarily Capitalistic. How that manager "perceives" the situation is a critical dimension often overlooked in the discussion of the environmental models. It is this aspect which will receive the greatest amount of attention in this discussion.

It is with this line of questioning that the assumptions behind the ecological-environmental models is being considered. Perhaps both models seem a logical extension of "what is" already blindly accepted in a culture. That there is not a questioning of the underpinnings from which these models are built.

Public Relations as a Major Group of Boundary Spanners

Historical Treatment of Environmental Focus in Public Relations is on Roles. Originally boundary spanning was not the critical focus. The public relations body of

knowledge collection (1988) did create categories highlighting public relations in terms of roles and included: practitioner roles from a management perspective, role differences, counseling roles, and examined the role players in terms of gender effects. The role the public relations professional early in the literature was not perceived from a global perspective. Now the role, although viewed from an international perspective, is not as fully explicated in the literature as a multicultural phenomenon (PRSA Taskforce, 18-19). However, those primarily involved in the intercultural and international concerns have proposed a model which fits the boundary spanning concept.

Fred Casmir of Pepperdine University in his article on "Third-Culture Building: A Paradigm Shift for International and Intercultural Communication" outlines a boundary spanning model which highlights some of the same roles familiar to public relations. In the following table his key concepts are outlined:

Third-Party Inputs in the Process of Third-Culture Building

(1) **Monitor or chronicle:** The third party may watch the process, provide a record of the process, or raise the consciousness of the parties regarding what appears to be transpiring between them. This role might be played by a historian or by an acquaintance to either or both parties.

(2) **Nurture:** The third party might encourage, reassure, or facilitate. Counselors, agents of civil or government institutions, marriage brokers, friends, or elders might be among those who play such roles.

(3) **Facilitate:** The third party might volunteer assistance. This role is most often played by representatives of standing institutions and agencies.

(4) **Manage:** The third party provides a plan for interactions and tests relationship development in terms of its progress in reaching the desired end state. Some businesses have implemented plans for cultural diversity in the workplace that would fall within this definition.

(5) **Build:** The third party may set out to effect a particular synthesis between two or more distinct entities, usually without regard to the wishes of the parties involved. The efforts of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to integrate Native American nations into the mainstream at the expense of their languages and distinct cultures exemplify such intervention.

Basically the perception is that third-culture building is done primarily through "pressure or duress" (Casmir, 422-423).

Boundary Spanning--A Concept Borrowed From Management. The home for the boundary spanning function seems to evolve out of management and sociology. Everett gives credit to Cutlip for indicating the need to study the organizational ecology in 1951. But, again, this is the lack of awareness of the developments in communication (includes speech communication). The Quarterly Journal of Speech published an article on "Speech and Leadership in Business" in February 1948. More specifically, the Journal of Communication published an article on "The Role of Communications in the Training and Public Relations Activities of a Life Insurance Company"--May 1951; "Communication in Industry"--November 1951; Management Looks at Communication Again"--November 1952; "Report of the Committee on Communication in Industry"--November 1952; and "Public Relations and Mass Motivations--November 1953. Meanwhile, in Journalism Quarterly the earliest mentions focused on "Public Relations and the State Government"-December 1937; "Publicity for National Defense--How It Works"--September 1941; "Public Relations at an Army Post: Fort Benning"--June 1942; and "Trends in Public Relations Training and Research"--Spring 1952. Thus both fields were mentioning communication within organizations and specifically the role of public relations. The difficulty of public relations professions in journalism to publish their research is related to the initiation of scholarly journals (refereed articles) devoted specifically to public relations--the Public Relations Review and the Public Relations Annual.

It is fair to say that the journalistic approach and the speech aspect of the communication field did hold the public relations into narrower paths of development. The real thrust for public relations professionals to be primarily decision makers came

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from scholars merging together from various disciplines and interacting within each others professional organization. However, whether the emphasis should be "management" is not totally accepted here. In fact, management may be a shortsighted view of the potential in the public relations role--paricularly as a boundary spanner.

Beyond Economics, Skills, and the Dominator Model of Social Organization.

The above discussion focused on the need to view the boundary spanning from a more holistic purview which helps the greater of society. The present boundary spanning models--the adaptive and selective--are built on the assumptions of competition and economics. Neither model is effective for the societal problems facing public relations professionals today.

What is particularly important about eliminating the dominator model of social organization is the public relations professional is connected to a larger contextual possibility of social organization. Beyond the corporate management thrust, public relations becomes more responsive to the emerging organizational challenges--the gangs, the technological communication networks, and the transient organizational pressure groups which can be quickly mobilized today. Even in the corporate sphere the public relations professional will have greater sensitivity to the third culture building process. It is time to rethink where we are going with our public relations models and information may not be the primary focus.

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